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Migration Skill Corridor Report PHILIPPINES-POLAND

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Like two ships in the night: The need to formalize the Philippines-Poland migration skill corridor

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Abstract

This working paper examines the Philippines-Poland migration skill corridor (MSC) from the political, legal, institutional and social perspective. It offers a detailed analysis of the corridor's emergence and shape, influenced by political transitions and incompatible systems, where the Philippines and Poland remain like "two ships in the night." Adopting the corridor team's methodological approach used by the Link4Skills project and drawing on interviews with policymakers, experts and practitioners, as well as an examination of laws, documents, and statistics, this working paper describes the corridor as predominantly middle-skilled with strategic bilateral aspirations. So far, however, no formal agreement or partnership has been established between the two countries. Furthermore, although the Philippines is known for sending both semi-skilled workers and highly skilled professionals abroad, the needs of the Polish labour market, as well as its approach to the recognition of high qualifications and the migrants' integration, effectively discourage and limit skilled migration, resulting in "brain waste" for both countries. The primary cause of this phenomenon is Poland's formal reluctance toward a Bilateral Labour Agreement or any other form of formalizing relations with the Philippines. This approach is influenced by Poland's strategy of prioritizing OECD countries and favouring a flexible, market-based management model with minimal bureaucracy. Furthermore, the Polish government emphasizes the economy automation and the activation of domestic labour resources, while avoiding politically sensitive and costly institutional commitments. The paper categorises the corridor as emerging and recent, given that trends indicate that it was only in recent years that migration from the Philippines to Poland intensified. As a new destination for the Philippines, Poland is a potential strategic partner in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in sectors such as logistics, transport, welding or maritime industry. Polish skilled migration policy is characterized as ad-hoc and demand-driven, the corridor is heavily privatized. The main bottleneck for the private sector actors are limited visas slots and difficulties in accessing the digital system, as well as delays in the institutions issuing work permits. Migrants face challenges regarding language requirements, full integration and skills recognition. The paper suggests the need to establish more coordination between the two governments.

1. Legal, political and institutional frameworks and relations

This section shows the main approach towards skilled migration between the Philippines and Poland. It provides an overview of the incompatibilities between the two systems as well as identifies the most important sources of law and documents that influence relations between the two countries and their migration policies. In addition, the section highlights the uniqueness of the corridor in terms of its emerging nature, but above all in terms of demographic differences compared to the traditional Philippine migration trends.

So far, there is no bilateral agreement between the Philippines and Poland and there is lack of effective bilateral discussion. A mix of strategic opportunity, institutional fragmentation, and regulatory gaps shapes the current migration of Filipino workers to Poland. As labour shortages persist in key Polish sectors such as manufacturing, food processing, construction, logistics, and transport, Filipino workers have become an increasingly visible part of the workforce in Poland (MLFSP (nd)¹). Yet this growing migration flow operates without a formal bilateral framework, relying instead on fragmented, market-driven mechanisms that pose challenges for coordination, protection, and long-term planning. All the key informants (Kis), especially Filipino policy makers, view Poland as being in need of more workers in various sectors, which could be better organized within the formal and regular pathway. The Philippine approach to migration contrasts with Poland's ad hoc, privately driven, and state-disengaged approach. The Philippines has built a robust legal and institutional system to support labour migration, rooted in **the 1974 Labor Code of the Philippines**, which provided the foundational basis for the protection of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) with both intermediate and high skills. As labour migration continued, **the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995** (amended by RA 10022 in 2010) set the policies and programs to promote the protection of OFWs at all stages of migration. It is important to understand that the Philippine migration system is a true "fortress" whose declared primary purpose is to protect citizens from exploitation. At the top of this system stands the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) an agency established in 2021 that centralizes migration management and oversees the licensing of all agencies and employers. Among DMW's key functions are the regulation of private recruitment agencies, migration documentation, and supporting the return and reintegration of OFWs. Following the Labour Code and subsequent laws and regulations, foreign employers cannot directly hire Filipino workers. Recruitment must go through authorized, DMW-accredited private agencies, which handle about 90% of overseas placements. The remaining 10% involve government-to-government arrangements or DMW-approved direct hires. All legally deployed OFWs are documented by the DMW. While the state assists all OFWs, those who follow legal channels are generally better protected, with access to official information and social protection programs. This system aims to safeguard workers and ensure ethical, transparent migration processes especially given the government's significant investments in the education and skilling of its own citizens (Ortiga 2021). After half a century of temporary labour migration, the DMW has also outlined a 10-point agenda in managing labour migration in the post-COVID 19 period. Item 7 of **DMW's 10-point agenda** aims to "Pursue deeper bilateral labour relations with OFW host countries, which includes measures on safe, transparent, and fair labour mobility, as well as the development of "giving back mechanisms" through investments and brain gain initiatives in partnership with relevant government agencies."² Thus, the Philippine system reflects principles of ethical recruitment, worker protection, reintegration support upon arrival and structured migration, which resonates with international standards such as those outlined in **the IOM's 2023 Skills Mobility Partnerships (SMPs)** framework.

Although the Philippines has expressed interest in formalizing labour cooperation with Poland – such as through a Bilateral Agreement (BA) or a Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI), there has been no indication of reciprocal interest from the Polish side. Although, according to Asis & Ducanes (2024), in 2018 the Polish Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Policy (MLFSP) began talks with Philippine partners regarding an agreement on the admission of workers from the Philippines (as cited in Kastner 2018), such agreements had still not been formalized by 2026³. The Philippines' pragmatic interest in the Polish market contrasts with the lack of such interest on the Polish side:

¹ According to the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy the number of work permits issued to Filipinos rose from 2,057 in 2018 to 37,988 in 2024 which seated them on the first position among third country nationals in Poland.

²For further details, see: MWO New Zealand (n.d.), *Vision, Mission & Core Values*. Retrieved on 5 May 2026 from <https://mwo-newzealand.dmw.gov.ph>.

³ Only formal cooperation under the framework of mutual cooperation on crime and justice was signed in June 2026 between the governments of both countries, see more: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. (2026, February 25). *Negotiations on an agreement on mutual assistance in criminal matters*. Gov.pl. Retrieved on September 10, 2026, from <https://www.gov.pl/web/philippines/negotiations-on-an-agreement-on-mutual-assistance-in-criminal-matters>.

“Poland is thriving. And I think the climate there is very conducive to industrial expansion (...). They also have expressed preference for healthcare workers. But the challenge in Poland is, though some hospital facilities would not require language proficiency⁴, as they would also accept only English proficiency, they expressed desire that health personnel, for instance, should be proficient in Polish.” (L4S_PH_exp_01)

Another key informant added: “There’s the issue of access to regulated professions, like in the medical field. (...) professional chambers often act to protect the exclusivity of their professions.” (L4S_PL_pol_08). In the bilateral relations, some others ups and downs have occurred, notably related to visa availability following the 2023 Polish “visa scandal”. This practice, which involves both pressure from employers and recruiters on consuls and the corrupt involvement of high-ranking officials (including those at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to expedite procedures, ultimately led to the introduction of temporary restrictions on the issuance of documents⁵. Following the scandal, the visa process has become “chaotic” and has emerged as a “major bottleneck”, where slots are limited and quickly fill up, likely due to bots or agencies. Delays often result in work permits expiring before migrants arrive at their destination.

However, this scandal did not reduce the overall dynamism or nature of migration flows, but influenced the sceptical attitude of the Polish state toward signing bilateral agreements and led to greater bureaucratization of the migration processes. As a result of the above events in Poland, more interactions and networking are taking place among non-government actors. Recruitment of Filipino workers to Poland is heavily reliant on intermediaries, primarily Temporary Work Agencies (TWAs). These agencies not only handle recruitment but often act as the direct employers of OFWs, formally signing contracts with them and assigning them to various companies. In practice, TWAs also apply for work permits on behalf of the workers. Recruitment of Filipino workers often relies on informal networks between private agencies and employers rather than formal state agreements. Some agencies entered the Polish market through personal contacts abroad, and referrals among Polish employers are common. Filipino recruitment agencies do not encounter problems in finding workers for Poland as they possess a database of workers and, if needed, they also advertise job openings. In terms of employers’ requirements, for example, in the case of trailer truck drivers, license from the Philippines’ Land Transportation Office and English language are the basic requirements. Certification from the Philippines’ Technical Education Skills Development Authority (TESDA) is not necessary, except for first-timers or those without experience. Employer’s interview shortlisted applicants either online or in-person and where necessary, come to the Philippines to conduct skills test on place.

Poland’s migration policy is best characterized by its lack of formalization in the recruitment of middle- and high-skilled workers, a situation only recently being addressed by policymakers. It has also relied on ad hoc measures prompted by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as by the outflow of domestic workers – mostly to the West following Poland’s entry into the European Union in 2004 and the resulting growing need to fill gaps in the domestic labour market. Although the Philippines is an increasingly important source of labour, as evidenced by various press reports⁶ and the websites of Polish employment agencies particularly in manufacturing, logistics, transport, and industry, Polish government documents (including laws and strategic frameworks) currently contain no dedicated mechanisms for cooperation with the Philippines, such as BA or memoranda of understanding (MoU). In Poland, four key documents shape migration and labour policy. **The Act of 12 December 2013 on Foreigners** provides the primary legal basis for legalizing foreigners’ stay and employment, including issuing visas and residence permits. **The Act of 20 April 2004 on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions** – replaced

⁴ KI is most likely referring to private hospitals (e.g., aesthetic medicine clinics) rather than public healthcare institutions in Poland.

⁵For further details, see: Schmitz, R. (2023, September 18). *What we know about the visa scandal in Poland*. National Public Radio, Retrieved on 6 May 2026, from <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/18/1200197639/what-we-know-about-the-visa-scandal-in-poland>.

⁶ For further details, see: Kalus, K. (2025). *Sumienni i lojalni. O pracownikach z tego kraju "biją się" firmy*. Money.pl. Retrieved on 5 May 2026 from <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/pracowici-sumienni-lojalni-o-pracownikow-z-tego-kraju-bija-sie-firmy-7144198394538944a.html>.

in 2025 by *the Act of 20 March 2025 on the Labour Market and Employment Services*—regulates employment agencies and foreign worker recruitment, including Filipino migrants. Then, the *Act of 20 March 2025 on Foreign Employment in Poland* (officially *The Act on the Conditions for Allowing the Assignment of Work to Foreigners in the Territory of the Republic of Poland*) provides a legal basis for introducing the *Central Shortage Occupation List* managed by the MLFSP in sectors like construction, manufacturing, transport & logistic, healthcare or food industry. However, new regulations do not prioritize the Philippines or provide any specific pathways for Filipino nationals, nor do they include credential recognition or language and integration support. Then, *Poland's Migration Strategy 2025–2030* (adopted on 15 October 2024) under the title “Regain Control. Ensure Security” published in October 2024, aims to attract highly qualified migrants via a points-based system and prioritizes applicants from OECD or readmission-agreement countries. It promotes the EU Blue Card and full digitalization but again excludes the Philippines. As a result, Filipino citizens, even if highly skilled, must navigate longer, more complex procedures and are not considered a strategic priority. Despite the generally favourable framework for skilled migration, Filipino workers remain institutionally overlooked and lack targeted support. The current situation is characterized by a fundamental incompatibility between two systems: Poland’s flexible and decentralized market and the Philippines’ protectionist state, which treats its workers as a strategic resource. This incompatibility is best captured by referring to the uncoordinated activities of both countries as “like two ships in the night.” We illustrate this incompatibility below:

Table 1. Comparison Overview of Philippine and Polish Frameworks for Labour Migration: Key Elements of the Filipino–Poland Migration Skill Corridor

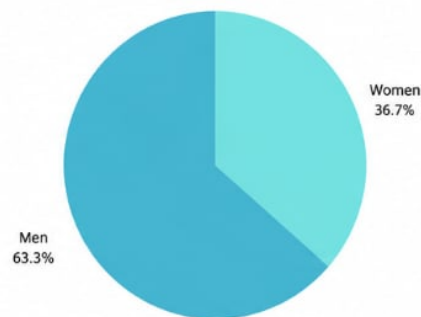
Category	Philippines	Poland
Migration Approach	Structured, rights-based, state-led	Ad hoc, employer-driven, reactive
Key Institutions	Department of Migrant Workers (DMW)	Ministry of Labour, Family, and Social Policy (MLFSP); Ministry of Interior and Administration (MIA); Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)
Legal Framework	Labor Code (1974), Migrant Workers Act (1995), DMW Act (2021)	Act on Foreigners (2013), Migration Strategy (2024), Labour Market Acts (2025)
Recruitment System	Mostly through DMW-accredited agencies and G-to-G direct hiring	No formal channel with PH; general foreign worker rules
Bilateral Agreements	Interested in formal cooperation (e.g., JDI)	No intention in bilateral or formal partnership with the Philippines
Skill Recognition	TESDA certification, pre-departure training	No streamlined recognition or targeted skilling support
SMP Alignment	Largely aligned (ethical recruitment, reintegration, structure)	Not aligned; lacks agreements, recognition, ethical oversight

Source: own elaboration.

Additionally, the Polish Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) in 2023 listed about 9,730 Filipinos registered for insurance in Poland. The three main sectors of employment were administrative and support service activities, manufacturing, and transportation and storage (ZUS 2024). From the interviews and literature (Wanicka & Patzer 2024; Wanicka 2025), we know that Filipinos are currently working in manufacturing, food processing, construction (e.g., welders, electricians, pipefitters, painters), logistics and transport (e.g., truck or bus drivers). Therefore, Filipino migrants in Poland often work in occupations that differ from the occupations they dominate globally – such as nursing, seafaring, or domestic work. In the case of the Philippines-Poland corridor, we are seeing a unique reversal of trends, in contrast to global

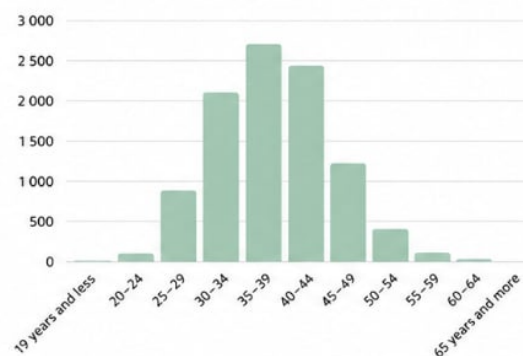
Filipino migration, men (63.3%) dominate here in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, and construction. The demand for male workers has shifted the migration pattern from a female-predominant worldwide (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Filipino migrants in Poland by gender in 2023
(Social Security Institution 2024)



According to ZUS data from 2023, 69.6% of Filipino migrant workers in Poland were aged 35 or older, compared with 30.4% who were under 35, indicating a predominance of older migrants, particularly in key sectors such as manufacturing and transport (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Filipino migrants in Poland by age group in 2023
(Social Security Institution 2024)



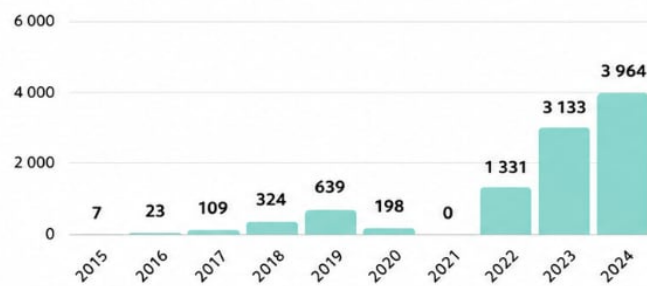
These distinctive characteristics observed in the Philippines-Poland emerging corridor reflect the types of foreign workers recruited to Poland and the occupations they pursue there. This migration flow is marked by a shift toward male-dominated roles and non-traditional sectors, reflecting a unique pattern that underscores the need for a more structured, ethical, and mutually beneficial partnership, one that builds on the Philippines’ strong institutional framework, including the DMW’s commitment to ethical recruitment, bilateral cooperation, and worker protection.

2. Implementation: Recruitment

This section highlights a rapidly developing yet deeply uncoordinated market-driven, grassroots system, emphasizing its sudden emergence, the dominance of the private sector and its informal nature, especially through “third-country” or online recruitment.

Deployment data from the DMW shows that there has been a notable increase in the deployment of OFWs to Poland, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic came under control. Even during the pandemic itself, Poland was one of the few economies in the world that did not close its borders to migrant workers. Figure 3 shows a sharp increase in the number of newly hired workers from the Philippines following the pandemic (from 7 in 2015 to nearly 4,000 in 2024).

Figure 3. Deployed landbased OFWs to Poland, new hires only
(Department of Migrant Workers)



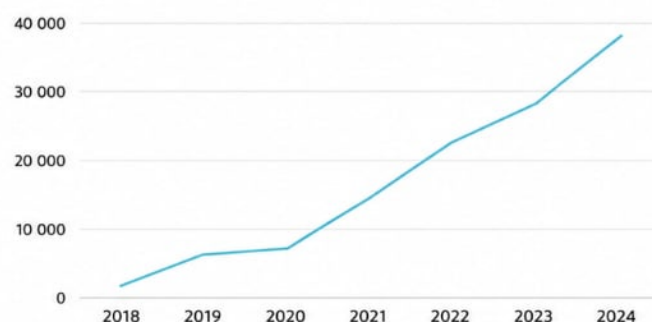
According to KIs from the two Filipino recruitment agencies (**L4S_PL-PH_prac_06**; **L4S_PL-PH_prac_07**), they received requests from Polish employers for Filipino workers, but because of the problems with the visa appointment and processing in the embassy in the Philippines, they have put recruitment for Poland on hold for the time being. This has led to another phenomenon: a shift in recruitment from legal channels to informal channels that are outside Philippine oversight. For OFWs who are already overseas and wish to apply for employment to Poland (or other destinations), the Philippines does not allow “third-country hiring”. OFWs must process their contract for a new destination from the Philippines. Aspiring migrants from the Philippines based abroad who directly deal with Polish employers must go through the DMW process; otherwise, they will leave as “undocumented workers” from the Philippine perspective. A significant share of Filipino migrants arrives in Poland not from the Philippines directly, but from countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (Wanicka 2026) to speed up the process. However, because they skip the DMW requirements, the workers are considered as not documented. Polish intermediaries and employers are also recruiting Filipino workers from these locations, and because this is not regulated by DMW, workers could end up paying more without any protection. Migrants are motivated to migrate to Poland as they view it as a gateway to the EU with easier access to long-term stay and possible family reunification. The Philippine Migrant Workers Office (MWO) is responsible for accrediting companies hiring from the Philippines. Formally, a process should take 7-10 working days if documents are complete, with a basic fee of around 100 USD. However, many Polish companies are not accredited, often due to a lack of proper information, and probably fear that if they go through this process, it will take a long time and will become more expensive.

In general according to the Filipino experts, workers hired by recruitment agencies in the Philippines encounter fewer problems than third country hires and direct hires. For example, migrant workers in Poland, particularly those hired through third countries, face more abuse compared to, for example, the Czech Republic (with whom Philippines established bilateral agreement in 2024). Policy makers put attention on the problem of hidden salary deductions and unmet job expectations, often leading to runaways (**L4S_PH_pol_02**). Although this problem tends to affect migrants employed in sectors that do not require high qualifications, it remains a serious issue in Poland.

Legally deployed workers typically pay around PHP70,000 upfront, including a placement fee equivalent to a one-month salary (according to Philippine rules), which is significantly lower than the costs for those hired through informal routes or those who are hired directly (OFWs who directly negotiate with employers and bypass DMW could spend at least PHP300,000). Workers recruited through official channels also benefit from better protection and accountability, while those bypassing the system must seek help from the MWO in Prague if issues arise.

Data about issued work permits (Figure 4) also show that Filipino migration to Poland has seen a significant increase in recent years (the number of permits has steadily risen since 2018, from around 7,000 to close to 30,000 in 2023). In 2024, approximately 38,000 work permits were issued to Filipino nationals, making them the top nationality in this category, surpassing Indians and Nepalese, who usually ranked higher than Filipino migrants.

Figure 4. Work permits issued to the Filipino migrants in Poland (2018–2024)
(Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Policy)



The current corridor operation is characterized as a “Wild West-style cowboy market” due to lack of formal agreements and oversight. Polish employers began to look to Filipinos also due to increasing demands and labour shortages as well as costs associated with Polish and recently also Ukrainian workers. Filipinos are valued for their strong work ethic, discipline, reliability, and adaptability, as well as English skills and cultural similarities (e.g., Catholicism). However, experts (**L4S_PL-PH_exp_01**) warn that common perceptions, seeing Filipinos as dependable, hardworking, and loyal are oversimplified. It is considered highly stereotypical and misleading as Filipino migrant workers are rather mobile and increasingly responsive to better offers. Migrants often pay high, poorly explained recruitment fees sometimes reaching tens of thousands of PLN, mainly when the recruitment and hiring happen outside of the DMW process.

To sum up, deployment of Filipino workers to Poland has grown notably, especially post-pandemic, driven by labour demand in sectors like manufacturing, logistics, and construction. However, the corridor remains informal and unbalanced, hampered by visa delays, lack of bilateral agreements, and reliance on intermediaries who actively recruit Filipino workers in “third-countries”. As a consequence, many workers face hidden costs, unclear contracts, and limited protections, particularly outside the DMW system during the recruitment process.

3. Implementation: Skilling

This section describes the formalized pre-departure training and orientation system in the Philippines, which remains ill-suited to the specific technical and linguistic standards in Poland. It also highlights the lack of systematic support upon arrival, which forces Polish employers to provide ad hoc additional training to their employees and often leads to underutilization of skills (de-skilling).

Today's labour market requires both highly skilled and moderately skilled workers. Before leaving the Philippines, Filipino middle and skilled must first complete the online seminar called Pre-Employment Orientation Seminar (PEOS) to know whether working abroad is for them and to avoid being illegally recruited. Next, they must attend a one-day Pre-departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS) covering employment terms, rights, and life abroad to aid their overseas adjustment. In some destination countries, the embassy or the MWO conducts a post-arrival orientation seminar (PAOS) to supplement and update the information in PDOS. Nevertheless, only recently (June 2025), the Philippine embassy in Poland, with the support of MWO Prague, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), organized the first PAOS, focused on cultural differences between both countries. Although the meeting was attended by a limited number of migrants and its thematic scope did not touch on all the problems faced by Filipinos in Poland, it was a breakthrough. However, access to professional skilling aligned with Polish labour needs (e.g., language, technical standards) is limited. Prior to the departure of migrant workers for Poland, the KIs from the Filipino recruitment agencies (**L4S_PL-PH_prac_06**; **L4S_PL-PH_prac_07**) claim that the workers must meet the requirements of the Polish employers. The skills of the workers are assessed during the interview by the Polish employers, a video presentation of the workers' skills, or in the case of employers hiring trailer truck drivers, they come to the Philippines, interview the applicants and conduct a test drive. Recruitment for drivers requires a valid license, English proficiency, and GPS skills, followed by a mandatory three-month training period upon arrival in Poland.

To date, there is no discussion between the Philippines and Poland about skilling and recognition (hence, there is not much that can be said about this in this section). A KI from a training centre (**L4S_PL-PH_prac_08**) said that they offer two tracks – a 2-3-month training program following the curriculum of TESDA, and a 7-8 month-training program following the curriculum of the Confederation of Tourism and Hospitality (CTH), which equips students with CTH Professional Cookery. The latter track offers the possibility of an international internship (including Poland). In 2019, the centre sent 12 students for an internship in hotels in Poland; the batch got stranded during the pandemic and was later on absorbed by the hotels. The above-mentioned KI said that the tourism and hospitality sector in Poland could provide opportunities for middle-skilled Filipino workers. While their program is in line with international requirements, the TESDA training could be improved and updated to enhance the employability of graduates locally and internationally.

The skilling processes for Filipino migrants, encompassing language and professional training, as well as pre-departure and follow-up orientation, are shaped by a complex interplay of Philippine governmental institutions, private recruitment agencies, Polish employers, and international organizations. Key players include TESDA and DMW, Polish ministries, NGOs, and the local Filipino communities, as well as private recruitment agencies (to a lesser extent) and employer-owned training facilities. For regulated professions like healthcare, Polish language proficiency (usually C1/C2 level) is essential and presents a major barrier.

“Well, I think there would be general reluctance. I’m not saying that from my own perspective, but rather reconstructing the general social mood that it might be difficult. One big problem with these kinds of medical professions is that they really do require... They require very, very good language skills. It’s hard to imagine someone working as a nurse or a doctor or any medical professional with (...) a B2 level. You really need C1 or C2, and that’s going to be difficult. That’s going to be a tough requirement to meet, because learning Polish is just incredibly hard.”
(**L4_PL_exp_17**)

Training is offered both in the Philippines and Poland, though access in Poland is often limited by capacity and funding priorities (usually favouring Ukrainian refugees and migrants since the Russian attack in 2022) and the commercial actors’ willingness. This results in the actual training (formal and DMW-licensed) and skilling taking place mainly in the Philippines. Although the Polish key policy makers (like the (MLFSP) formally supposed to fund basic language courses and certification, employers typically do not offer language support. Instead, Migrant Integration Centres (MICs) provide beginner to intermediate Polish classes (A1–B2), while specialist language training remains limited to dedicated schools and small-scale initiatives, informal language classes organized by the Filipino communities are more popular. Due to demanding work schedules, many migrants perceive learning Polish as unrealistic, even though they are generally fluent in English, which suffices in sectors like hospitality.

However, Polish employers often require retraining due to qualification mismatches or additional employer’s needs (like language skills and GPS use awareness in Polish transport mentioned before) sharing the responsibility with TWAs. Some companies conduct skills testing in the Philippines before hiring, while others train workers in Poland after arrival. TESDA training is free and government-funded. In Poland, migrants face restricted access to state-supported courses unless specific eligibility criteria are met. Vocational retraining is underfunded and many Filipino migrants are employed below their skill levels, accepting manual jobs due to limited options. From the Philippine perspective, little to no structured skilling is provided post-arrival. Language barriers are a major hurdle. Vocational or integration-focused programs exist but are rarely accessed by non-EU migrants due to cost or eligibility issues. In Poland, costs for recruitment and orientation are largely pushed onto migrants, despite trade union advocacy for employer responsibility. Some employers offer on-site training or partner with overseas institutions, but systematic support remains lacking.

While the Philippines offers structured pre-employment and pre-departure orientation and some skills training via TESDA and private agencies, skilling pathways remain fragmented and misaligned with Polish labour market needs. Filipino skilled workers, especially in regulated professions like healthcare face major barriers due to high language requirements and drivers have to deal with limited access to

vocational retraining adjusted to the Polish transportation rules. This highlights the urgent need for coordinated skilling, credential alignment, and accessible post-arrival support to build a more effective and ethical migration corridor.

4. Implementation: Skills recognition and matching

This section describes the difficulties faced by skilled Filipinos in having their qualifications recognized in Poland, stemming from the lack of formal bilateral agreements and differences in educational standards. This leads to a situation where migrants are forced to work below their actual qualifications, resulting in the phenomenon of brain waste. It also explores the phenomenon of de-skilling which results from the frequent skills mismatching, noting that Filipino migrants generally accept working below their education level as a pragmatic compromise for future stability.

As was shown earlier, the Philippine-trained skilled workers often cannot use their skills in Poland due to lack of recognition frameworks. This is one area that could benefit from discussion and coordination between the two governments. This is in contrast to Germany, which signed such an agreement in 2013 (specific for Filipino nurses; followed by a MoU in 2022, aimed at expanding recruitment to include other professionals), or the 2024 joint communique with the Czech Republic to establish a labour consultations mechanism for safe migration and OFW protection.

The Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) plays a key role in recognizing foreign educational qualifications in Poland. NAWA manages a special database, verifies documents, provides training, and prepares information on foreign education. For Filipino workers, TESDA issues national certificates as proof of job-related skills and competencies. However, the absence of a bilateral agreement between Poland and the Philippines prevents formal recognition of TESDA certificates. In contrast, for Ukrainian nationals, a bilateral agreement between Poland and the Ukraine simplifies the recognition process. The problem is also different educational standards. The Philippine education system, such as the absence of a high school final exam (equivalent of Polish “matura”), creates hurdles for Filipino students seeking to enrol in Polish universities, despite rare exceptions, as highlighted by one practitioner:

“Degree recognition is a whole other issue that also needs to be discussed. It's a low-level hurdle, but still a hurdle. Degree recognition is needed, though, strangely enough, some universities in Poland accept Filipino students, and others don't (...) under our law, anyone applying to study at a public university or any university, really must have passed the “matura” exam. (...) But why, though? If we want to open up to the world, and the “matura” doesn't even exist in some countries... (...) how are these students from third countries supposed to get into our universities? (...) The Academy, the Ministry of Education, and all the other bureaucracies got involved ‘Mrs. Krysia talked to Mrs. Basia’ and they talked some more, and time passed, and nothing came of it. For now, only a few proactive schools are admitting students without a problem.” (L4S_PL-PH_prac_05)

As previously indicated, in Poland, recognition is bureaucratic and slow. It is also costly, and professional chambers resist liberalization of access. Poland's migration policy lacks robust cross-ministerial coordination, with different ministries often operating independently. This complicates comprehensive policy implementation for skill recognition. As practice shows, even when formal recognition processes exist, workers may still feel their expertise is dismissed or undervalued informally. Filipinos are highly valued for their excellent English skills, making them suitable for roles in administrative support, private international schools, and hospitality. Still, there is a general reluctance among Poles to imagine Filipino nurses working in Poland, partly due to the language barrier, but also due to broader cultural and social acceptance issues. Professional organizations in Poland, particularly in fields like medicine, often act to protect the exclusivity of their professions, creating barriers to the recognition of foreign qualifications.

To date, the lack of formal bilateral agreements between Poland and the Philippines has prevented the effective recognition of migrants' qualifications, leading to “brain waste” exacerbated by language barriers and systemic differences. Although Poland has an institution that recognizes

qualifications, the system remains slow and bureaucratic, which hinders knowledge transfer and prevents the full utilization of workers' potential to the benefit of both countries. Some Filipino experts highlighted a mismatch between worker skills and Polish labour market expectations. For example, while hospitals may not officially require Polish language skills, in practice, lack of proficiency can still be a major barrier. When qualifications from the Philippines don't "match what we need", Polish employers engage in re-training and upskilling based on specific needs once workers arrive in Poland. For instance, according to certain Polish employers participating in our study, some Filipino seafarers struggled with basic skills (e.g., in math) despite having a post-secondary education, while Filipino drivers require at least two months of dedicated training to make them fully prepared for European standards, including traffic rules and tachometer operation. To address this "skills mismatch" after arrival, one of the KIs opened a school in the Philippines to train applicants before deployment. The training focuses on aligning expectations with onboard realities, including specific menus and strict operational standards, ensuring workers are fully prepared to meet the required quality levels.

"Despite the applicants' prior experience, there were often challenges with their performance on board. So this discrepancy largely stems from what we call... "mismatch" between their expectation and the actual standards required on board a cruise ship. So the environment and operational standards on cruise ships are very demanding. (...) To address this gap, we establish our own culinary and hospitality schools (...). So we focus on aligning their expectations on board the realities, train them with the specific menu they will handle on board a cruise ship. They have to ensure the standard required to reach the position as per the ship's operational needs. So our approach is to elevate the quality of our workforce, ensuring that they are well prepared and capable of meeting the high standards expected on board. (...) The licensed recruitment agencies should have the biggest liability here, because they're hiring people who mismatch the skills."
L4S_PL_PH_prac_16)

Specialized training, such as "specific menu" handling for cruise ship roles or 'two months of dedicated training' for drivers, is provided to ensure workers meet European standards. The Philippine government's TESDA programs are designed to meet high-demand job categories for both domestic and international markets, but may need updating. TESDA's efforts may be insufficient in this informal corridor, and current training is mostly ad-hoc, led by employers and agencies without sufficient institutional support. According to some experts, many Filipino migrants, despite having tertiary and higher education, often find themselves working in jobs below their qualifications in Poland, leading to de-skilling. While de-skilling is a common experience for Filipino migrants, a KI expert of Filipino labour migration to Poland observes that this experience does not evoke a strong sense of personal failure among Filipinos as it might for other nationalities:

"De-skilling definitely occurs (...) but the experience of de-skilling among Filipinos is different (...) [it] doesn't seem to evoke a strong sense of personal failure. (...) Yes, they might acknowledge that someone who was a senior engineer in the Philippines is now working in a tire factory, but it's not framed as humiliating (...). For many, the most important thing is having a stable job. (...) Stability and a regular income are more important. Even if the salary isn't high, non-material benefits like work-life balance, access to Catholic churches, and the ability to live according to their values matter greatly." (L4S_PL-PH_exp_01)

Some Polish employers travel to the Philippines to conduct training and testing (e.g., for welders) to ensure workers meet specific requirements before deployment. These employers might partner with accredited local Philippine agencies and even bring their trainers or technology to the Philippines to provide specialized training, saving efforts once workers arrive in Poland. This is done because some certificates from the Philippines may not always align with specific job needs in Poland, which is underlined by practitioners and third sector representatives. One of the KI said:

“License recruitment agency, they're just hiring and hiring Filipino, bringing (them) here without knowing that they have to learn this. So a large (number) of the drivers are failing the license exam highlighting the need for (...) deployment preparation. (...). We really feel bad with all these drivers having no job, and awareness, and perhaps proper training.” (L4S_PL-PH_prac_16)

In summary, Filipino workers migrating to Poland often face a skills mismatch between their qualifications and the practical demands of the job, prompting Polish employers to provide additional training upon arrival, particularly in sectors like transport and hospitality. Such training sessions are still less commonly organized by Polish private-sector actors. Since state-led TESDA programs can be outdated or insufficient for the specific needs of the Polish labour market, many workers undergo deskilling, which they accept pragmatically by prioritizing financial stability and personal security over their professional status.

5. Contrasting mobility regimes

This section examines the contrast between the rigorous, worker-protective certification system in the Philippines and the uncoordinated and slow-moving bureaucracy on the Polish side concerning the OFWs mobility. It highlights visa chaos as the main barrier, forcing employers and formal intermediaries to use informal channels and engage in risky recruitment from third-countries.

As mentioned earlier, the Philippines has an established system for the recruitment of Filipino workers for overseas employment. The foreign employers who want to recruit Filipino migrants formally have to be accredited by the DMW (or through the MWO where it is present), the workers contracts have to be verified, and they must complete pre-departure requirements. The Philippines' approach is described by some experts as “rights-based” and tries to ensure that migrant workers are protected by law:

“From the Philippine side, I think the idea (of the DMW) is for a rights-based approach to labour migration perspective. It's like upscaling the migrants that are deployed in other countries, because the idea is that they are less vulnerable”. (L4S_PL-PH_exp_11)

At the same time, this process takes time and workers have complained that recruitment from the Philippines is time-consuming. The process begins by the Polish agency or company submitting a request to the DMW for accreditation and, by extension, permission to recruit. The DMW does not handle this centrally but conducts the verification through the MWO in Prague (which covers Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine) and its team is not particularly large. This is the first “bottleneck.” During this time, migrant workers wait to find out whether they will be able to take a job with a specific Polish company or an agency cooperating with an accredited Philippine agency. Next, every potential contract presented to the applicant must be reviewed for compliance with Philippine standards. If everything goes well, Polish employers must apply for a work permit for the migrant (which also takes some time (In principle, this should take place within 30 days, but the practical experience of some of KIs our suggested a timeframe of about 3 to as long as 6 months)). Only with such a permit does the migrant have the right to apply for a visa. The candidate must then undergo medical examinations at clinics licensed by the Philippine Department of Health (DOH). The system is designed in such a way that the results of these examinations can deprive an applicant of the right to leave the country for reasons that, under different circumstances, might be considered trivial. Before departure, they apply for the most important document, the OEC (Overseas Employment Certificate). Without this physical or digital pass, no overseas Filipino worker will be cleared by immigration at exit points in the Philippines. This entire process entails costs for medical examinations and various documents. For applicants from the provinces, they have to travel to Manila or regional centres which are additional costs. To speed up the process, workers may have to pay beyond regulated fees. In practice, workers pay recruiters sums that drastically exceed their future monthly earnings; amounts in the range of 250,000–300,000 pesos (approx. 20,000–25,000 PLN) are not uncommon. Ultimately, the system that is supposed to protect OFWs is long, complicated, expensive, and often drives migrants into debt even before the plane takes off, which reduces their subsequent stability in Poland. An OFW who changes employers within the same destination country or moves to another destination must undergo the same process of documentation and contract verification, beginning with employer accreditation by the MWO.

It is notable that the migration and mobility processes for Filipino migrant workers who are going to Poland involve a complex interplay of actors, procedures, and significant challenges, as well as opportunities for improvement. Polish regulations also affect mobility. Among the pre-arrival challenges, the most common issues include difficulties in securing a slot to submit a visa application through the “e-consulate” system, as well as long time for work permits. The new Polish migration strategy tries to simplify procedures by digitalization, which also seeks to eliminate outsourcing loopholes after the “visa scandal”:

“That’s where the real bottleneck is. From what I know, getting a visa has become extremely difficult, especially after the visa scandal. There’s a fixed number of slots, and they’re taken immediately – possibly by bots or by agencies acting on behalf of employers who can’t handle the process alone.”
(L4S_PL-PH_exp_01)

For employers complying with the Philippines' rules can be complex and time-consuming process. Employers are required to cover a range of recruitment-related costs, including round-trip airfare, mandatory insurance, DMW processing and visa fees. It helps if there is an MWO which can walk foreign employers through the DMW process, recruitment cost may be nevertheless high and passed on to migrants. Under the Philippine regulations (in the case of licensed migration) placement fees charged to legally deployed OFWs should not exceed the equivalent of one month’s basic salary. In practice, however, migrants bear many costs during the application process, including expenses related to documentation, accommodation and training, with limited enforcement in Poland. Since the legal route is too narrow, migration “spills over” into other channels and actors. “Fixers” can come into the picture to “help” people migrate to Poland (Wanicka 2026). Also in the online space, Filipino micro-influencers are emerging as informal advisors. They build credibility by sharing the hardships of life in Poland, but at the same time they often act as “promoters” for specific agencies, blurring the lines between assistance and commercialism (Wanicka 2025). Amid all this, illegal fees are flourishing. The greatest risk is that in this system, everyone actually loses control and migrant mobility is most severely restricted.

The Filipino mobility is not a straightforward and easy path. In the Philippines, the DMW trying to ensure legal and rights-based protections for OFWs. As formal pathways remain narrow and cumbersome, recruitment spills over into informal channels, increasing costs and reducing oversight.

6. Integration, retention in Poland or circular migration

This section examines the contrast between the Philippine model of circular migration with return assistance and the fragmented integration in Poland, where migrants rely primarily on religious communities and NGOs.

Both middle and high skilled OFWs in Poland generally face three options: to stay and try to integrate, to move onward to another country or to return to the Philippines. If they would like to stay in Poland, they can take advantage of initiatives and activities related to integration support. On the Polish side, the Migrant Integration Centres (MICs) are supposed to offer basic support, integration and training, while the Ministry of Interior and Administration (MIA) shapes migration policy, often influenced by political sentiment. Integration support is also provided by international and local organizations. For example, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) operates a Migrant-Info helpline and portal (to be translated into Filipino) providing reliable information on immigration and labour law in Poland. IOM manages “the Legal Work in Poland” portal to raise awareness about safe employment. Soon “the new Working and Living in Poland” portal will be operational. Also, All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) advocates for worker protections, offers legal/language support. While Polish migrant integration is partly supported through public funds (e.g., language courses), according to some policy makers, the main obstacles remain limited access to Polish language courses and restrictive entry into regulated professions (L4S_PL_pol_08).

While the Polish MLFSP is developing a comprehensive integration document and aims to establish a national cadre of public sector professionals specializing in migrant integration, Filipinos largely self-organize through religious (Catholic Church, evangelical groups) and sports communities (like the

Filipino Basketball League (Wanicka 2026)). The Catholic Church, which has an 89% membership in Poland according to the 2024 Center for Research on Social Opinion poll - “becomes a home for many Filipinos”:

“Well, like I said, Filipinos are, you know, really very adaptable (...). once they find other Filipinos, or once they know the Filipino community, once they see or find the church where they can listen, at least to, you know, a mass, even if it's not in our language, or even if it's not in a language that we understand, it's a big help. We can... we can easily adjust to... to those to... to any new environment.” (L4S_PL-PH_pol_13)

Thus, in Poland, integration efforts are carried mostly by civil society (e.g., churches, NGOs). State-led MICs should offer services, but these are not fully developed yet and thus underutilized by Filipino workers. Communities and NGOs focus on educating (mostly they are the one, who provide Polish courses) Filipinos about Polish rules and contracts, especially for those coming from third countries, partly stepping in to perform the role of the Polish state. While Poland favours long-term settlement for some groups, its integration policy remains fragmented and passive, leaving much of the work to civil society.

For those who are using formal and licensed migration pathways, the Philippines provides support before migration, while migrant workers are abroad, and upon their return. During migrants' stay abroad, the Philippine government also provides integration support through the Philippine embassies or consulates and/or through the MWO in destination countries with sizable OFW population (there are currently 42 MWOs worldwide). These offices handle post-arrival orientation seminars, contract verification, mediating between workers and employers in case of disputes, counselling, and training programs (e.g., financial literacy). The involvement of the Philippine Embassy in Warsaw and MWO in Prague is palpable in the lower rate of contract breaches, as was reported by one KI from a Philippine recruitment agency (L4S_PL-PH_prac_07). The same KI talked about low return rates among Filipino workers sent to Poland. Philippine recruitment agencies are required to monitor the conditions of their deployed OFWs and, should there be an incident, they must report it within five days according to DMW rules. According to one Filipino KI, to monitor their deployed workers in Poland, they have a chat group where they discuss concerns and updates (L4S_PH_pol_01).

Those who renew their contract with the same employer may opt to “monetize” the return ticket and continue to work, or return home at some other time (e.g., for Christmas). OFWs who are eligible to access permanent residence can do so. Nonetheless, the widespread use of civil-law mandate contracts in Poland instead of standard employment contracts is problematic when we think about the integration and longer retention of Filipinos in Poland. While Polish trade unions, international organizations, and NGOs strongly advocate for mandatory employment contracts to ensure worker protection, this proposal faced significant lobbying from employers and temporary work agencies and was ultimately removed from legislation. This practice is seen as unethical and exploitative from the DMW and MWO perspective, making workers more vulnerable and limiting their ability to seek redress. This practice is seen as widespread and often goes unpunished due to weak Polish regulation.

Another path for Filipinos in Poland is to migrate to other places with “better opportunities” in Europe or beyond. Poland, through its official representatives such as ministry officials, declares that it aims to retain migrant workers for long-term settlement as a response to demographic decline and labour shortages. On the one hand, the state claims to want to keep migrants; on the other hand, there is no coherent, active integration policy. What dominates is a passive, market-driven approach (if employers hire them and migrants choose to stay, the problem will resolve itself). Poland does not actively promote return for all groups (e.g., Ukrainian nationals), preferring full integration for those who stay. This attitude is aptly captured by the phrase: “The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on” (L4S_PL_pol_10) as was expressed by one Polish policy maker.

Still another option is to return to the Philippines. OFWs who wish to return to the Philippines can get assistance from the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO), an office in the DMW dedicated for this program. Strengthening return and reintegration programs and services is also part of **DMW's 10-point agenda** (e.g., points 3 and 4). Most Filipino workers are employed on a fixed-year contract with accredited companies return home, with flights often paid by the employer. The MWO checks documentation for returning Filipino migrants to ensure their legal status to be able to return to their

workplace after their vacation in the Philippines. Additionally, in case of emergency or crisis situations, the Philippine government provides repatriation assistance. For those who return to the Philippines upon completion of their work contract (usually for 2 years; for seafarers, it can be 6-10 months), the return ticket should be shouldered by their employer.

For many Filipinos, return aligns with the Philippines' circular migration model, supported by reintegration programs and a broader national strategy to reduce dependency on overseas labour through local job creation. The Philippine government also works on possibly reducing the need for outward migration:

“They do come back. [The Philippines state] is working on enabling them to earn similar salaries in the Philippines (...). Filipinos are saying: 'Poles, outsource your pharmaceutical, IT, construction, and other jobs to us. We'll do the work, just don't take our people. Let us work here.' That's how I understand it.” (L4S_PL-PH_prac_05)

As far as Philippine government policies on reintegration are concerned, the objective and aspiration are towards sustainability and a huge task is to generate decent employment to provide Filipinos the option to stay. This is beyond migration policy and is more of a development policy. Filipino migrant workers in Poland navigate complex pathways of integration, onward migration, or return, with varying levels of institutional support. On the Philippine side, formal migration processes include extensive pre-departure preparation, contract verification and reintegration support through the DMW and the NRCO. These efforts reflect the Philippines' rights-based, circular migration strategy, which seeks to encourage eventual return and brain gain. In Poland, however, integration remains fragmented and largely market-driven. While some state initiatives like MICs and IOM-supported portals exist, most support is provided by civil society, churches and migrant networks. Filipino workers often rely on religious communities for social stability. Though Poland claims to favour long-term settlement, it lacks a cohesive integration strategy, leaving migrants to self-navigate or seek better opportunities elsewhere.

7. The role of technological solutions

This section describes Poland's strategic push toward automation, aimed at reducing its reliance on migrant labour, although, paradoxically, showing how Filipinos perceive Polish work in regards to automation. It is also emphasized here that technology cannot eliminate migration, but it can rather require a redefinition of migration toward a better match of skills to avoid wasting workers' potential.

Poland's strategic and stated pivot toward automation reflects a growing intent and political interest to reduce reliance on migrant labour, especially in low- and mid-skilled sectors. Polish senior government official underscored this shift, urging employers to reconsider their dependency on foreign workers:

“You [employers] need to rethink your strategy. There won't be more workers. You cannot replace them. If you employ 1,000 workers today, plan for having 500 in ten years because there simply won't be more. You'll have to pay more. And if you try to maintain 1,000, your competitiveness will drop instantly because you'll need to pay three times as much.” (L4S_PL_pol_10)

According to the above statements from policymakers, Polish employers will need to shift away from relying on cheap foreign labour and start investing in alternative recruitment methods and automation. This directive indicates a structural transition, where the state envisions automation and reskilling as long-term solutions to labour shortages. Migration, therefore, is framed less as a sustainable workforce solution and more as a temporary measure during a phase of labour market recalibration. In this vision, automation isn't just technological – it is political and strategic, signalling a shift away from traditional models of labour mobility. Yet, automation does not negate the relevance of migration; instead, it demands a more strategic alignment between labour flows and evolving economic structures. As an expert from one international organization observed, automation is not an end to migration but a catalyst for rethinking its design:

“Migration is supplementary, a complementary measure (...) (some economic experts stated) that we should primarily invest in robotics, automation, technology development, IT, artificial intelligence, and so on, because that’s the most future-proof path. These technologies will impact many sectors of the economy. (...) Then migration can be an additional, supportive tool, but only when well-managed. We need to design and assess Poland’s labour market needs thoroughly, projecting them for several years ahead and based on that, create targeted migration strategies.” (L4S_PL_exp_09)

Hence, migration must become more targeted, addressing occupations or sectors where human labour remains indispensable such as caregiving or service work, while being integrated with skilling pathways that prepare workers for technologically evolving environments. However, within the emerging Philippines-Poland’s migration infrastructure and bilateral channels, these have yet to reflect this nuanced repositioning. Otherwise, both workers and employers are left navigating a fragmented landscape.

On the Philippine side, the prevailing model of short-term, circular labour migration sits uneasily with Poland’s emerging automation agenda. Filipino workers often arrive in Europe expecting to engage in modern, mechanized workspaces but encounter the opposite. One expert after reading the study on OFWs in Poland, shared that what surprised her the most, was that many Filipinos had encountered more advanced technology in places like the UAE or Taiwan than in Poland:

“Migrants from the Philippines, many of whom had previously worked in places like Dubai or the UAE, encountered more advanced technology there than they do in Poland. In those countries, a lot of physical labour is done by machines. But here in Poland, they have to do everything themselves. (...) Another man in that study (...) even said something along the lines of, “In Poland, the worker is the machine.” He had previously worked in an electronics factory in Taiwan and the contrast was shocking to him.” (L4S_PL_exp_09)

These accounts reveal the ethical and structural tension underpinning current migration practices. AI and automation are not replacing migration but redefining its role, creating a critical trade-off: while long-term reliance on low-skilled migrant labour may decline, the short-term need for smarter, ethical, and skills-aligned migration is growing. In the Philippine-Polish corridor, this shift exposes key tensions. Migrants who are often overqualified for manual jobs, receive limited training for automated sectors.

8. “The need for partnership”

This section highlights the complete lack of formal bilateral agreements and shared success metrics to date. It points to the asymmetry between the Philippines’ pursuit of structured, ethical monitoring and Poland’s preference for a flexible market-based approach, which hinders the full realization of the “triple win” model.

As repeatedly emphasized in this report – formal bilateral partnerships between Poland and the Philippines are “largely non-existent”. This is a major gap compared to other EU countries like the Czech Republic, Germany, and Austria, which have signed such agreements with the Philippines. This lack of formalization is a significant limitation from the perspective of the Philippine government, which actively seeks such agreements to ensure worker protection and manage labour flows. For the Philippines, the success parameters would be a high rate of company accreditation, ensuring workers are hired legally and ethically without exorbitant fees. Respect for employment contracts and provisions, and deployment through the official (DMW) channels.

According to Polish actors from the regulatory or policymaking arena (e.g. L4S_PL_pol_10), “when it comes to this rare resource, a highly skilled worker – other factors (rather than formal state-led skill partnerships) play a more important role.” Polish efforts in migration policy and integration as well as attitude towards retaining talents are considered to be in an early phase and aren’t just starting to “take shape” now. Similarly, the corridor is so far devoid of indicators of success. At present, apart from the general increase in the number of work permits and the gradual nature of integration efforts, the focus is on the

implementation of tools and strategies rather than on post-implementation evaluations of Polish bilateral partnerships with other countries. For Poland, success parameters could be access to a reliable, diligent, adaptable, and affordable workforce to fill labour shortages, with “minimal bureaucracy” or strict regulations. What is more, Polish government seems to prefer this seemingly hands-off approach.

Under the current informal system, Poland gains labour but underutilizes talent and risks ethical breaches e.g., problems with recruiters, fees, and hiring requirements. In terms of wins, there seems to be more wins for Poland than for the Philippines. The “triple win” concept (benefiting host, sending, and migrant) may be ideal, but the unregulated system offers lower cost and flexibility to employers which is why they are also not interested in formalities which may impose requirements or responsibilities for them. One practitioner cited below argued that the triple win model could work, but only if migration were legal and well-regulated. The host country (Poland) would benefit from tax revenues and social security contributions paid by employers; employers would gain reliable workers; and migrants would have the opportunity to gain valuable experience. This approach, if implemented systematically, could help address many of the challenges currently faced:

“Look, first, does the [Polish] state benefit? Absolutely. We get a good worker who contributes to the company’s output. The company pays taxes, pays ZUS [Social Security System] contributions, pays income tax, so the state earns money. Then, the individual benefits – becomes smarter, gains experience working in Europe, and returns home as a more skilled person.” (L4S_PL-PH_prac_05)

Formal bilateral agreements between Poland and the Philippines are currently lacking, which limits coordination and worker protection as well as skill retention. While the Philippines seeks structured, ethical migration pathways with safeguards and clear indicators of success, Poland’s system remains informal, favouring flexibility and low bureaucracy for employers. Experts on both sides agree that without formal partnerships, transparent processes, and structural monitoring, the potential for a “triple win” remains underrealized.

9. Consequences and effects

This section explores the tangible outcomes for both countries, addressing issues such as brain drain, underutilization of migrant skills, and the lack of systemic integration mechanisms. It also reflects on how evolving labour market dynamics, including automation and regional competition, shape this emerging corridor’s sustainability and equity. The migration corridor between the Philippines and Poland offers immediate economic benefits, higher wages and remittances for Filipino workers, and much-needed labour for Polish employers. However, without formal bilateral agreements or strong oversight, the long-term effects are lost.

According to some Filipino practitioners, compared to the Philippines and other countries, Poland offers higher wages for semi-skilled workers, such as for drivers: “The salary is really improving, it has been increasing. When we had our first deployment to Poland back in 2018, their salary was only 630 euros; now it’s 1800 - 2200 euros for a truck driver.” (L4S_PL-PH_prac_06). The higher wages offered by Poland mean more remittances to the families of OFWs, who directly benefit from them. As to whether the migration of Filipino workers to Poland will result in the loss of skilled or semi-skilled workers in the Philippines cannot be generalized across all skills. For example, the Philippines has a huge supply of drivers and their migration will not lead to a drain in the Philippines as was noted by the same practitioner:

“In transport (...) Poland requires many drivers, but they do not only focus on Filipinos (...). They do not only focus on Filipinos. They go for Indians and Chinese (...). They say, we are (...) spending less in hiring other nationalities. If there is a competition, the demand for Filipino drivers is declining (...), but for other categories – factory, manufacturing companies they would still go for Filipinos, because performance-wise, skill-wise and communication-wise, they are number one.” (L4S_PL-PH_prac_06)

Moreover, Poland's reliance on employing specific migrant groups in particular sectors, such as transport or domestic care (where mostly Ukrainian women are deployed), does not necessarily contribute to brain drain in the countries of origin, like Philippines. The above aligns with the narrative that the migration from the Philippines to Poland brings mutual benefits and does not necessarily result in losses for the Philippine labour market for as long as the labour supply in the Philippines is not compromised. The question of brain drain or brain gain will have to consider skill levels. Both countries are aware that *Mobility* and *Talent Partnerships* are international frameworks that can support circular migration by facilitating legal pathways and skill development that is beneficial to both sending and receiving countries. It could be concluded that Polish employers benefit the most, accessing affordable labour through a loosely regulated system. Thus, their definition of "success" often comes at the expense of migrant rights. Migrant workers bear significant costs, facing precarious contracts, high fees, and skill mismatch.

The Philippine government views the lack of bilateral agreements as a barrier to protecting its citizens. Recruitment practices are often non-transparent and poorly regulated. Exploitation risks are high due to the absence of formal agreements and oversight, raising concerns among the Philippine interviewees, but mostly NGOs, trade unions, and migrant advocates. Filipino workers experience deskilling, working below their qualifications or possessed work experience. For the Philippines, this contributes to brain waste.

The inability to build a skills-based economy results in the loss of both skilled and semi-skilled workers (e.g., electricians, plumbers, but also manufacturing workers), harming both Poland's economy and sending countries like the Philippines. All of this hinders the development of a skills-based economy:

"If we're unable to create a skills-based economy and those people have to leave, that's a failure (...). Skilled manual workers also left. And that's equally harmful – for the economy, and for the Philippines' economy as well. After all, someone has to be an electrician, someone has to be a plumber, right? (...) These workers are really needed too, but unfortunately, there are people who tend to undervalue them. (...) I think we absolutely shouldn't do that (...). In Poland, (...) there's a certain fear of bringing in these kinds of workers [as] (...) they're viewed as competition (...) but we know that Polish welders are moving to Norway, so these are all just links in the migration chain (...). Foreign welders or other skilled workers are simply filling the spots left by those who've moved further on." (L4S_PL_exp_17)

The goal of addressing labour shortages is valid, but the scepticism towards formal agreements by some officials and the politicization of migration hinders effective policy development. Nevertheless, the dual focus on automation and migration seems to be a pragmatic approach. The Philippines-to-Poland migration corridor has the potential to offer mutual short-term benefits: Polish employers gain affordable labour to address shortages, while Filipino workers earn significantly higher wages especially in sectors like transport and manufacturing, and send home valuable remittances. However, without bilateral agreements, systemic oversight, or integration mechanisms, this corridor risks long-term costs: brain drain and deskilling for the Philippines and underutilized talent and a missed opportunity to build a skills-based, cooperative migration system.

10. Conclusions

To conclude, the metaphor of "two ships in the night" describes the corridor's two parallel, uncoordinated governance approaches operating without official connection. The Philippines uses a structured, state-led, and rights-based framework seeking formal bilateral cooperation. In contrast, Poland relies on an ad-hoc, reactive, and employer-driven market model without state-level agreements. As a result, both governments move past each other without active intergovernmental dialogue.

The corridor is primarily shaped by the demand for semi-skilled and medium-skilled labour in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, construction, and transport. Although Filipino migrants are

perceived as highly educated and proficient in English, formal credential recognition is weak; diplomas (including TESDA certifications) rarely align with Polish administrative requirements but also practical employers' needs. While de-skilling and underemployment are widespread (e.g., engineers or teachers working in manual manufacturing), migrants often generally view this mismatch pragmatically prioritizing temporal job stability, safety, and a regular income over immediate status loss.

State-led support after arrival including specialized Polish language training, cultural orientation, and legal integration service remains severely lacking in Poland. As a result, civil society, faith-based communities, and informal migrant networks step in to perform basic settlement functions. Furthermore, the absence of formal state channels can encourage risky recruitment pathways, such as third-country hiring, which can expose workers to hidden fees, unclear civil-law contracts, and reduced legal protection.

Poland is frequently chosen as a strategic "gateway to Europe" by Filipino workers or an accessible option. However, because Poland lacks formal BA with the Philippines, unlike competitors like Germany or the Czech Republic, it can soon find itself "at the end of the line" in retaining global talent. High mobility among skilled Filipino workers means Poland faces ongoing risk of onward migration toward Western European countries offering better wages and formal integration pathways. The need for a formal governance framework comes from the potential unethical recruitment and employment risks, such as third-country hiring, hidden fees, and precarious contracts. Such a framework can prevent widespread deskilling and brain waste among highly educated Filipino specialists and aligns migrant skills with long-term economic demand in Poland.

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List of interviews

We conducted 15 interviews in that corridor in general (9 made by Polish partner, and 6 made by the Filipino team). Eight of them are exclusive to the PL-PH corridor:

L4S_PL-PH_exp_11
 L4S_PL-PH_exp_01
 L4S_PL-PH_prac_05
 L4S_PL_exp_09
 L4S_PL-PH_pol_13
 L4S_PL_pol_08
 L4S_PL-PH_prac_16
 L4S_PL_pol_10
 L4S_PL_exp_17
L4S_PH_pol_01
L4S_PH_pol_02
L4S_PL-PH_prac_06
L4S-PL-PH_prac_07
L4S_PL-PH_prac_08
L4S_PH_exp_01